MATERIAL CULTURE

Dwellings

342
352
554
562

The sides of the Yakut winter dwelling are occupied by wide wooden banks called *oron* (bank) or *olox* (seat). The northeastern corner (Fig. 19), where a door or an uncovered entrance leads to the cattle stalls and the other small corners, has no banks. The names of the banks and their uses are of considerable ethnographical interest. The entrance to the Yakut dwelling always faces east, the seat of benevolent deities. The bank directly to the left of the entrance has no name and is designed for household objects. Sometimes there is no bank at all at this point. On the plan illustrated (Fig. 19) Nos. 1 and 3 are called the right side of the dwelling, i.e., facing outward to the entrance. No. 1 is called *atax oron* (the first bank) or *āna suol oron* (the bank by the door). Its ancient name was *kōñūl olox* (the free seat). This seat is for unimportant, impoverished visitors, and serves as a sleeping place for male laborers. In the Kolyma District, during the marriage feast, the bridegroom sits in this place with his back to the banqueting guests.

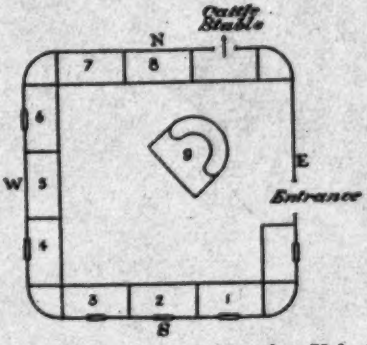

Fig. 19. Groundplan of a Yakut Hut, showing the Position of the Banks, Windows, and Entrance.

[513]
[585]

No. 2 is called *ortuku uña oron* (the right middle bank), *tūnnūxtax oron* (bank near the window), or *orto olox* (the middle seat). The last is the most ancient name. The designation for No. 2 is the same as for No. 1. When a son-in-law visits his bride in the house of her parents before the *kalym* (bride-price) has been paid, No. 2 is assigned to the couple as a sleeping place.

No. 3 is called *billirik*. It is regarded as the best, most comfortable, and warmest seat and sleeping place in the Yakut hut. Usually there is no window over this bank, although in the sketch a window is shown. The most honored guests or the shaman invited for a performance is seated there. During a wedding the parents of the bridegroom, relatives, and the matchmakers, and other members of the wedding party have this place. The *billirik* is also known under the following names: *tūspediyér olox*, *ulūtuyar olox*, or *tūs olox*.

[585]

No. 4 is called *bastyñ uña oron* (the right first bank). According to Sieroszevski this position carries less honor than the *billirik;* it is less

2: Jochelson E-5 (1884-1902) 1933 Yakut

comfortable, has a window above it, and is within the range of the cold wind from the open entrance door. During a wedding it is occupied by the owners of the house and their nearest relatives; here also are seated honored guests when the *billirik* is already occupied. The *billirik* and the *bastyñ uña oron* form the "venerable corner." There a table stands, over which, under the ceiling, is a small carved and decorated shelf, called *holloruk*, on which are icons and images of saints painted on boards, to which wax candles, decorated with ribbons, beads, and other pendants, are affixed; or an embellished oil lamp is hung in front of the images. There on Sundays and holidays, headed by the hosts, the inmates and guests gather for prayer, so that this corner is transformed into a kind of chapel. During the prayers, the people stand in front or at the rear of the group, in accordance with their age and position in the community. They bow, cross themselves, hold lighted candles, and burn incense. In Fig. 20 may be seen a brass picture of saints fastened to a board surmounted by crosses. The ancient name of the *bastyñ uña oron* was *kŏhŭl oloz*.

No. 5, the bank opposite the fireplace (No. 9) called *kătăharin*, is the family sleeping place above which there is no window.

No. 6, *kănčiărā oloz*, is also called *xañas billirik* (left *billirik*) where adult girls (daughters and relatives) sit, work, and sleep. *Kănčiăra-jon* means young people in general.

No. 7 is called *xañas oron*. It serves as a sleeping place for female laborers or servants and grown children of both sexes. On this bank, hidden by a curtain, the bride sits during the three days' wedding festivities.

No. 8 is called *isit oron* (bank for cooking and other household vessels, from *isit*, kitchen ware).

Over Nos. 7 and 8 is usually a shelf called *dolbŭr*.

All the banks beyond the *kătăhărīn* are regarded as belonging to the women of the dwelling. When facing the entrance, inside, the male half of the house is to the right and the female half to the left. The *kătăhărīn* (No. 5) or the family sleeping place and all the banks of the female half are supplied with calico (in former times, leather) curtains which are let down during the night.

From the Russians the Yakut adopted the use of tables and tabourets. Illustrations of models of such furniture may be seen in Fig. 21. The table is usually much lower than our tables and the tabouret is as high as the table. The table with refreshments on it is placed before guests sitting on the banks (*oron*) described above. The Yakut name for

[cf. p. 136, category 116 -- ANALYST]

2: Jochelson E-5 (1884-1902) 1933 Yakut

177 a table, *ostuol*, shows its origin from the Russian word for table, *stol*.
352 In ancient times, the Yakut used tables without legs, or boards, which were called *sandaly*. These were placed on the floor before the visitors or on the bank between them.

354 The fireplace (*osox*, or *kömülüök*, from the Russian, *kamelek*, No. 9) is situated in the northeastern corner of the dwelling; its front part faces the dividing line between the male and female halves of the house. The hearth, quadratic in form, consists of a wooden trough made of logs or heavy boards, and lined with beaten clay. The length of the sides of the trough is about 5 feet and the height about 11 inches. The chimney, open in front and sloping backward somewhat, consists of poles, tied with twigs at the top, over the roof, and coated inside with clay. The mistress of the house is the chief guardian of the hearth which is the family protector. She alone is privileged to pass in front of it; all the other women must go around back of it. If the master of the house or an honorary guest stands in front of the hearth, the mistress too must pass behind it. During her menstrual period a woman is not allowed to touch the fire or to approach the hearth. A woman lying-in and her midwife may not enter the part of the house lighted by the flame of the hearth. A bride entering the house of her husband must throw a few little sticks into the fire and make a libation of melted butter. After these, she becomes a member of the family. It seems that the throwing of little sticks is symbolic of making fire, the task of a woman member of the family. A photograph of the Yakut hearth (Fig. 52) may be seen in the chapter on pottery.

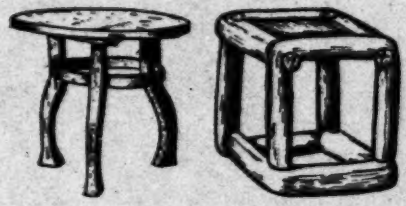

Fig. 21 (70-9284, 9281). Model of a Table and a Chair.

562 841 844 585 354

342 171 Fig. 22 shows the exterior of the Yakut earth hut. When built separately from the earth hut for cattle, it has the form of a truncated pyramid, but in the illustration the two structures are combined. The cattle stable has an exit door to the yard, but there is also an inside door leading from the dwelling to the cattle stable (Fig. 19). The Russians call the Yakut earth hut, *yourta*, a name given to all types of native dwellings whether tents or permanent huts. The Yakut themselves call their earth hut, *balahan*, a name used also by the Mongoloid peoples of Siberia. There is a winter earth hut (*kystyk balahan*) and a summer earth hut (*sayylyk balahan*) which do not differ. The summer hut is

2: Jochelson E-5 (1884-1902) 1933 Yakut

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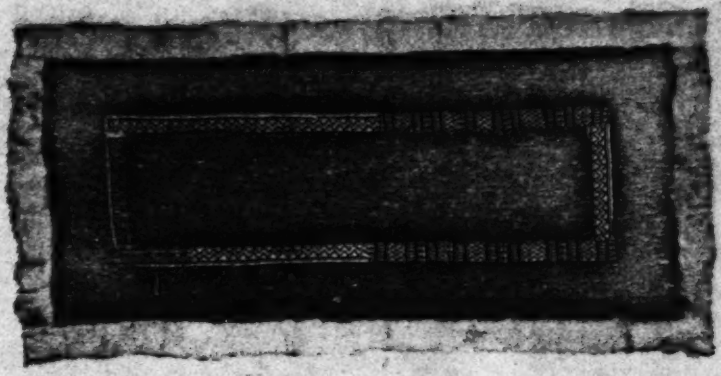
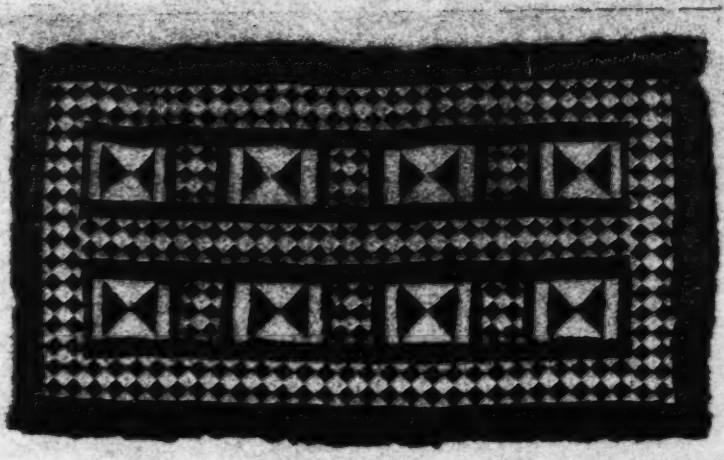


a



b

Fig. 97 *a* (70-9055), *b* (70-8929). Decorated Fur Rugs. *a*, Of cow, horse and coltskin; *b*, Of cow and horseskin.

9: Stadling--92 [2] E-3 (1898) 1901 Yakut
116; 342; 352; 562.

"The Yakut dwellings, the 'yurtas,' are wooden huts with sloping walls covered with a thick layer of turf. In the place of window-glass ox-bladders are used in summer-time and ice in winter. The window-openings are usually not more than a foot square in size. the fireplace is in the middle of the yurta, and is made of poles, placed close together and covered with mud or clay. Along the walls inside the dwelling run low nares or benches, between the wooden pillars, serving as sitting-places during the daytime and as bedsteads at night. The yurta is divided into two parts: to the right from the entrance is the women's and children's apartment, where, among the poorest classes, the cattle are also housed; and to the left that of the men. To the women's apartment men not belonging to the family are not allowed to go. The Yakuts generally have special yurtas for winter and summer, the latter usually situated near their meadows and haystacks. In the far north they often live in tents or huts resembling those of the Lapps."

10: Bush--174 T-3 (1865-67) 1871 Yakut
116, 342, 352

"Upon three sides of the room were ranged a single tier of bunks, serving as seats during the day, as well as beds at night. Those inseparables of a Russian habitation, the penates and samovar, attracted our attention at once upon entering, and gave the place an air of civilization;"

11: Lansdell--301 M-3 (1879) 1882 Yakut
116, 237, 352, 415

"The houses are not overstocked with furniture, and the chief cooking utensil is a large iron pot. At the time of the invasion of the Russians, this article was deemed such a treasure that the price asked for a pot was as many sable-skins as would fill it. They use also in winter a bowl-shaped frame of wicker-work, plastered with frozen cow-dung, in which they pound their porridge."

39: Jochelson E-5 (1888-97) 1906 Yakut

facing 426

415
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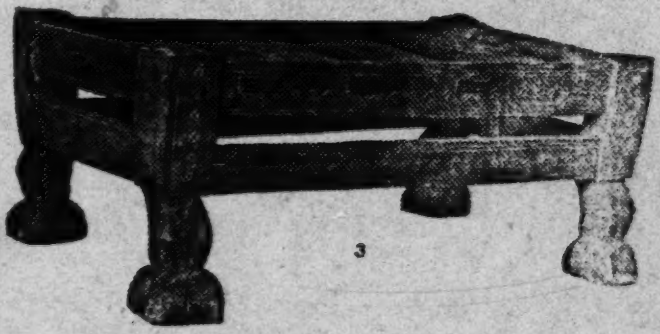

3

MOUTHPIECES AND STOOL FOR KUMISS CHURN OF THE YAKUT.

40: Burr --107-108 N-2 (no date) 1931 Yakut
116, 177, 281, 291, 352, 492

" The Yakuts evidently have a sense of the beautiful, for their clothing, made of the skins of reindeer, horse and dog, are not only very warm and comfortable, but decidedly pleasing to look at. The blending of the browns, blacks, fawn and white has an excellent effect, and is usually worked out in a chequered pattern in very good taste. They are expensive, though, and I was asked three hundred roubles for an outfit, about thirty pounds. But nowadays, of course, they have disappeared from use before Russian factory products. There was a specimen of a kamalán or rug, made in this same pattern, which attracted me very much. I was very anxious to acquire one, but was told they are rare, and that the Yakuts generally are very unwilling to part with them. A still finer specimen was a native saddle. This was somewhat on the lines of the Cossack design, with high pommels, but was richly ornamented with little round disks of lead, in the absence of a more decorative local metal, and the saddle-cloth was a particularly effective piece of [108] patchwork in variously coloured skins. "

/163 cont./

122 In particular he urged haste, for with the disappearance of the sun at the /164/ beginning of November the most frightful snowstorms customarily set in, which are very dangerous, especially on the tundra.

Unfortunately we did not have much time to converse with him, because night had already fallen and we still had a good stretch to cover to the balagan of the elder. Sachár O'ssipowitsch made us a gift of some fresh white and rye bread and a magnificent fish (néljma), a delicacy missing for a long time; we then left him, after he had most cordially invited us to stay at his house in Ssiktjách upon our return trip, even in his absence.

In the balagan of the elder we were greeted by his wife and given the best places, next to the fire, and the elder could not be talked out of showing us and our men hospitality with fat reindeer meat and frozen milk. The people here obviously had a better way of life than our Tungus friends along the Tunguska, who were certainly not poor.

342 For the first time we found ourselves in a Jakut /Yakut/ balagan and had to admit that in severe cold it was much to be [333] preferred to our light tschum /choom/. Such a balagan, or [335] yurt, also called stan when it is used as a station at the same time, and powárnja, that is, kitchen, by some travelers, is a rectangular hut with garret-shaped, sloping side-walls and a flat roof, made out of tree trunks, which are plastered with clay on the outside and are thickly covered with snow in the winter. Any cracks are carefully plugged up with moss from the inside. [354] The windows consist of thick sheets of ice; in the middle [352] stands a Jakut fireplace (kamelók), likewise made out of clay-plastered logs and around this are a number of sleeping places, that is, simple wooden chests without bottoms, which are filled with stamped-down earth /165/ and therefore provide neither a soft bed nor, since they extend directly to the outer [362] wall, a warm one; there are usually six of them. To be sure, [122] such a balagan still leaves much to be desired; in particular the fireplace usually stands too far from the sleeping places and during the night frightful cold comes in through the wide,

122 /190 cont./
123 a low box, usually in a half-reclining or crouching position, is very
• [352] tiring after any length of time. In the yurts of our hospitable Jakut /Yakut/ friends we had occasionally found miniature tables from one to two feet high, which were placed beside the sleeping places, but here in Ssiktjach for the first time we again sat on chairs at a table covered with a clean cloth.

/191/ Ninth Chapter

400 The Jakut /Yakut/ dignitaries. -- We exchange gifts. -- Narten of persons of rank. -- Northward again! -- Kūssūr. -- The upráwa /uprava/ of the Shigansker Ulússes /Zhigansk ulus/. -- The clergyman from Bulún. -- The ivory trade. -- The population. -- Prohibition against liquor. -- Unselfishness of the upráwa. -- At the Arctic Ocean again. -- The Jakut stan. -- Astronomical observations with the mercury frozen. -- Dshejelák-Dshaná. -- Animal husbandry in the far north. -- The northern part of the Werchojansk /Verkhoyansk/ district.

122 During our stay in Ssiktjách /Siktyakh/, the notables of the
[123] entire district one by one honored us with their visits -- various
[554] elders in the uniform described above, and finally a former
[292] golowá of the entire ulússes /ulus/, a dignified old man in a much more elaborate uniform than the others. His belt consisted of a broad gold braid and on it hung two swords, one an emblem of his office, the other, with pretty silver decoration on the hilt, a gift of honor from the government. We now conferred with these dignitaries about our further journey. Upon our arrival we had planned to move on, after a short rest, in a southerly direction, if possible, following the course of the Lena, directly to Jakutsk /Yakutsk/, or, if this could not be done, to travel to Wiljuisk /Vilyuisk/, and had even entertained the bold idea of skirting Jakutsk in the latter case and hastening via Oljókminsk /Olekminsk/ as quickly as possible toward the longed-for south. At first we /192/ did not at all believe the assertions of our advisors that the execution of these travel plans

53:Tokarev and Gurvich E-4 (no date) 1964
RV2 Yakut RV2

people used wooden floors, under Russian influence. The size of the dwelling varied from 5 × 5 to 10 × 10 m, and in height was slightly higher than the head. 342

An essential part of every yurt was the hearth and the benches along the walls, as well as the simple uniform utensils. The hearth (ohokh) was usually built on the right of the entrance, close to the northeast corner. It comprised a low (about 25 cm, rectangular area made of clay inside a log frame; a cylindrical pipe, slanting slightly backwards, made of poles and coated on the inside with a thick layer of clay was built above the hearth; the bottom of the pipe was open at the front and acted as the mouth of the stove, while the top went through the roof and was almost always open (it was usually stuffed with something overnight); in the winter there was always a fire burning in the hearth to warm and illuminate the dwelling. The hearth was well ventilated and gave out a lot of heat as long as it was being fed with fuel, hence it used up a great deal of fuel. 354

The plank benches (oron), which were used for sleeping and sitting, stretched along all the walls, filling the gaps between the vertical columns and the bottom of the slanting wall. The benches were divided into different sections, each with its own name and purpose. The most respected bench was the one on the left of the entrance along the southern wall, from the middle to the corner, opposite the hearth—the so-called billirik; somewhat less honorable was the adjoining bench running from that corner along the western wall—the *баστын уҥа орон* (right-hand front bench); these two benches comprised the corner of honor. To the right was the head of the household's seat (*кэтэҕэрин*). The other benches on the left-hand side of the dwelling were intended for the young men, for workers and for ordinary male guests; on the right-hand side (towards the hearth) was the female half of the dwelling, where the women of the family and visiting women sat. 352 353

The furnishings in the dwelling consist of a small, round or square wooden table (ostuol) in the corner of honor, and several chairs (olokhmas) with the characteristic shape of a hollow cube with ribs made of flexible rods bent at a right angle and a seat made of a thin board; the furnishings also included various kinds of boxes and chests (made of wood and bound with leather), household utensils and so on; the quantity and quality of all the furnishings depended on the wealth of the householders.

A shed of the same design as the dwelling was usually built onto the northern side for the cattle, often under the same roof, though sometimes divided off from the living quarters by merely a thin wooden partition. There was a door leading from the dwelling to the cattle pen behind the hearth. The pen was built on the northern side so as to save some of the heat, but the close contact of the wintering cattle naturally increased the amount of dirt and made the air in the dwelling worse, where it was stuffy and dirty to begin with. 343

A small awning resembling a porch, and sometimes even a porchway (chaampy, *кууга*), was built outside in front of the entrance, particularly by the richer people. 342

The yurt was the ancient winter dwelling of the Yakuts; references to it can be found in 17th-century documents. In the 19th century the yurt also became the normal summer dwelling. The summer camp yurts were constructed in the same way as the winter ones, except for small differences (a light leather door on a frame and so on) and there was no cattle pen. Instead of the latter a summer calf pen (titik) was built

glass, tambours (extra doors with an air lock in between) and zavalinkas (mounds of earth around the house). A common practice is to ice over the house for the winter with a mixture of snow and water. Double ceilings, double floors, horizontal flues and shutters are still used, although rather rarely. The brick or tile stove is sometimes combined with the traditional Yakut fireplace. In many houses there is an extra iron stove in addition to the brick stove.

The internal appearance of dwellings has also changed. The furniture known before to the Yakuts (tables, stools and benches) has become less massive and more varied. We now find bookshelves, chairs, small dressing-tables and mirrors. Factory-made crockery and utensils are encountered in every home. Clocks (including alarm clocks), writing materials, and books have become common, and phonographs are also sometimes found. In most houses the walls are adorned with posters, pictures of Communist Party leaders, photographs, bookshelves, and over the bed there is usually a rug made of skin from the reindeer's head, bead-embroidered saddlecloths, or else the walls are covered with cloth. The windows have curtains.

Tremendous changes have taken place in the way of life of the Yakuts. Many collective farms now have electricity and radio. Clean clothes, hot baths, and attention to their personal appearance are typical of most of the collective-farm members. There has been a change in interests, habits and way of life. The outlook of the population has broadened. Books can now be found in every house. In the settlements people enjoy movies, and attend lectures and discussions in the reading rooms. Young people take part in ski-races, chess and other sporting events. Amateur song and dance groups in the clubs are usually of interest to the whole settlement. The families are no longer isolated and no longer keep to themselves.

A typical innovation for city children is toys, such as figures of horses and cows, rubber dolls, rattles, clockwork trucks, and so on. In addition to these, we commonly find delicately carved wooden animals and tiny bows and arrows. In the schools and boarding facilities children amuse themselves with the most popular table games. In the spring and summer they play various games, including hide-and-seek and blind man's-buff.

A great deal has changed in the Yakut diet, as well.

It should be remembered that before the Revolution Yakutiya was a country of chronic famine. Most of the Yakut population suffered from starvation every year, particularly at the end of the winter and in spring. Bread has now become a normal food not only in the southern but also in the northern areas. Groats and macaroni are now part of the staple diet. The consumption of vegetables and potatoes has also considerably increased.

In many regions the collective farms grow cucumbers, radishes, cabbages, onions and beets. Vegetables are imported in the dehydrated form. Everywhere the population is amply provided with tea, sugar, and tobacco. There are bakeries at trading points in most settlements. Meat and fish are consumed by the Yakuts in large quantities, particularly in the northern regions, where they are the staple diet. In the southern regions an important part of the diet is dairy products. On account of the overall improvement in the living standards of the people, sapwood is no longer consumed as food. Nor do they eat pickled fish any more. Local traditions are still retained in the cooking of dairy products, meat and fish. In the northern regions meat is commonly undercooked. Milk is made into some curious dishes such as suorat, khayakh, chokhoon, хобуур and so forth. In a number of regions reindeer gristle is still eaten in the raw state as a delicacy, and so are the liver and bone marrow of this animal. Many families eat freshly